



The Task Force for  
**Recruiting – Retaining – Revitalizing**  
Agricultural Education in Iowa

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*Summary Report, Spring 2016*

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# Background

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## *About the Task Force*

The Governor's Council on Agricultural Education serves as an advisory board to review, develop and recommend standards for secondary and postsecondary agricultural education in Iowa. To address the rising demand and shortage of agricultural educators across the state, The Council established the Task Force for Recruiting, Retaining and Revitalizing Agricultural Education.

On Tuesday, January 12, 2016, The Council welcomed 25 task force members to a conference at the Iowa FFA Leadership Enrichment Center in Ankeny. The participants were asked to discuss and share ideas relating to the recruitment, retention, support and marketing of agricultural educators in Iowa.

## *Purpose*

While the number of agricultural education and FFA programs continues to increase on a national scale, the lack of agricultural educators hinders their success. As a result, the recruitment and retention of agricultural educators has become a prominent issue at the state and local level.

In response to the teacher shortage, the Task Force met to discuss overall questions in agricultural education, brainstorm ideas and identify specific suggestions. The overall purpose of the Task Force was to gather practical recommendations that could later be acted upon by other parties invested in agricultural education.

## *Participants*

The task force was comprised of members representing multiple sectors of agriculture and education, including: agri-business, teachers of agriculture, university teacher education, student teachers and current agricultural education students. Several members from the Governor's Council on Agricultural Education were also present and participated in the discussions that provided the framework for final recommendations. See the appendix on pages 10 and 11 for a complete list of participating task force members.

# Program Procedures

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## *The Process*

Following introductions at the day-long event, task force members were invited to serve on one of four committees representing the recruitment, retention, support and marketing of agricultural educators. During the break-out sessions, each committee was asked to review and reflect on a series of questions pertaining to their topic. The questions were provided to guide committee discussions; however, members were welcome to consider ideas or suggestions based on their own experiences and expertise.

Committee members were asked to identify a discussion leader as well as a recorder. All brainstormed ideas were collected, and the conference was concluded with a report of recommendations from each group. The following pages of this report outline the key discussions points of each committee and a one-page summary of collective recommendations.

## *Discussion*

Discussions were based on a list of overall questions to consider in agricultural education as well as individual topic areas. Below is the list of general questions and sample questions provided to each committee.

### *Overall Questions in Agricultural Education:*

1. What are the current trends in Agricultural Education?
2. What growth has Agricultural Education Programs, including the FFA, experienced in recent years?
3. What would the future be without Agricultural Education and Agricultural Education programs at the local school district?
4. What is the leadership value of Agricultural Education to agricultural business and industry?

### *Sample Committee Questions:*

1. What strategies should be used to **recruit** future teachers of Agricultural Education?
2. What are other states doing to **retain** Agriculture Educators?
3. What are the best practices that **agri-business** and **industry** can use to maintain a pool of qualified educators in agriculture?
4. What resources are needed to **market** the agriculture education program and the need for teachers and agriculture industry leaders?

# Recruitment of Agricultural Educators

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## *Key Discussion Points*

### **1.) Education and industry partnerships.**

- a. Industry and education should not compete, but work together to promote Agricultural Education.
- b. Both industry and education want the skills Agricultural Education has to offer including knowledge, leadership and communication proficiencies.
- c. A variety of career paths provide opportunities beyond traditional teaching appointments.

### **2.) Enrollment in Agricultural Education – Teacher Certification.**

- a. In addition to increasing the number of students enrolled in Agricultural Education at the post-secondary level, efforts must be made to increase enrollment in high school agriculture programs.

### **3.) Agricultural Education internships.**

- a. Students need real-world experiences that are developed outside of their coursework.
- b. Spring or summer internships with a current teacher would provide unique opportunities for prospective agricultural educators.

### **4.) Community focus in Agricultural Education.**

- a. A combination of public and private funds should support Agricultural Education programs at the community level.
- b. There is a need for area or district consultants to help local programs coordinate recruitment strategies.

### **5.) Agricultural Education recruitment events and programs.**

- a. Recruitment campaigns at events such as the State FFA Leadership Conference or Iowa State Ag Career Day would help generate interest and enthusiasm for Agricultural Education.

# Retention of Agricultural Educators

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## *Key Discussion Points*

### **1.) Requirements for a strategic retention plan.**

- a. In order to execute retention strategies, additional state funding and support is required.
- b. Further research and assessment is needed to provide data as to why people leave the profession.
- c. Strategies must be all-inclusive and include pre-service and tenured educators.

### **2.) Formal mentoring program for agricultural educators.**

- a. Guidance from an experienced mentor would help instructors learn how to balance the teaching lifestyle, pace themselves in accepting leadership positions and manage personal concerns.
- b. Local mentors could support new educators by helping them become accustomed to their respective communities.

### **3.) Leaders of retention efforts.**

- a. The Iowa Association of Agricultural Educators (IAAE), state staff and university administration should be engaged in the retention process.
- b. Additional leaders in the retention process may be identified once Team Ag Ed has completed its strategic plan.

# Support & Needs of Agri-Business

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## *Key Discussion Points*

### **1.) Strategic messaging and social media.**

- a. Business and industry could help promote teaching careers by sharing ready-made social media content including Facebook posts, tweets, memes and videos.
- b. Agricultural Education supporters should utilize strategic messaging to reach the target audience.
  - i. Examples of *Key Messages*:
    - 1. Agriculture is energy.
    - 2. Agriculture provides food, fuel and fiber.
    - 3. #elevateagriculture, #thankanagteacher
  - ii. Examples of *Fear Messages*:
    - 1. Lack of strong leaders and local communicators.
    - 2. Increasing food prices.
    - 3. Meeting the growing demand for food.

### **2.) Agricultural Education spokespeople.**

- a. Involving spokespeople who have experience in Agricultural Education would help express the value of having strong, highly visible agricultural programs, improve student perception and highlight transferable skills.

### **3.) Agricultural Education internships.**

- a. Providing internships or job shadow opportunities with current teachers would help employers identify ideal Agricultural Education recruits who have a passion for teaching.
- b. By completing internships or job shadows prior to student teaching, students can determine early on if teaching is their desired career path.

### **4.) Support from agri-business.**

- a. Agricultural businesses and industry could help develop the next generation of agricultural educators by partnering with local FFA chapters, promoting community service projects and targeting high school juniors and seniors interested in Agricultural Education.

# Marketing of Program

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## *Key Discussion Points*

### **1.) Agricultural Education spokespeople.**

- a. Spokespeople are essential to promoting the skills and personal development achieved through the Agricultural Education program.
- b. Agricultural institutions, industry and the general public can encourage young people to become professional educators by calling on spokespeople with outstanding leadership qualities.

### **2.) Local impact of Agricultural Education programs.**

- a. Agricultural Education programs support the training of future leaders in agri-business.
- b. While it is impossible to quantify the value of local agricultural programs, community support and outreach contribute to the continued success of Agricultural Education and cannot be overlooked.

### **3.) Social media strategies.**

- a. Because no entity is solely responsible for addressing the need for agricultural educators, creating an online presence could be a viable option for promoting the program.
- b. See the chart below for suggested platforms, goals, messages and audience.

<b>Platform:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facebook</li> <li>- Twitter</li> <li>- Snapchat</li> <li>- Instagram</li> </ul>	<b>Audience:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High school students</li> <li>- Agri-businesses</li> <li>- Other members of the ag community</li> </ul>
<b>Goals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase profile of agricultural educators crisis</li> <li>- Promoting skills rather than a specific agenda</li> </ul>	<b>Messages:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Localize, personalize , emphasize</li> <li>- Food, fiber and natural resources</li> <li>- Ag awareness, literacy and education</li> </ul>

**Agricultural Education**  
*Recruiting, Retaining, Promoting*



# Summary of Suggestions and Themes

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The following list is a culmination of suggestions and recurring themes generated by the discussions of each task force committee. These statements represent general ideas that could be used to advance the recruitment, retention, support and marketing of agricultural education in Iowa.

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1. ***Build lasting partnerships*** between agricultural industry and education.
2. ***Develop community focused initiatives*** that emphasize the local impact of Agricultural Education.
3. ***Engage with spokespeople and key agricultural leaders*** to promote the value of having strong, highly visible agricultural programs.
4. ***Fund internship opportunities*** with current agricultural educators to provide students with real-world experience prior to student teaching.
5. ***Create an online presence using social media tools*** to share strategic messages and to increase awareness of the agricultural educator shortage.
6. ***Request or apply for state, local, public and private funds*** to support future recruitment, retention or marketing strategies.

# Recommended Activities for Recruiting, Retaining, and Revitalizing Agricultural Education

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These activities are recommended for Team-Ag Ed, Iowa Association of Agricultural Education (IAAE), State FFA Board, Iowa State University Teacher Education program, and or other organizations to take appropriate actions as determined by these organizations. These recommendations are a result of a meeting of the Governor's Council on Agricultural Education on March 8, 2016, following a review of the Task Force Report.

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1. ***Seek funding to support the cost of a student intern to develop a social media campaign*** for the recruitment and retention of future Agricultural Educators.
2. ***Develop a "Signing Day" at the State FFA Leadership Conference*** to gain commitment from students to seriously consider preparing to become a teacher of agriculture. Sign off on a "pledge" to become a Teacher of Agriculture. Teachers will nominate students from local programs to be a part of this activity.
3. ***Conduct a workshop at the 2017 State FFA Leadership Conference*** focused on teaching agriculture as a career.
4. ***Develop an exhibit booth at the State FFA Leadership Conference*** focused on being an agriculture teacher. Free t-shirt to anyone signing a pledge to become an Agricultural Educator.
5. ***Invite all current Agricultural Education Teacher Certification students to attend the 2016 (and beyond) Summer Teacher Conference*** and be recognized and encouraged by the profession. Expenses covered by IAAE and outside sources.

6. ***Develop a plan to entice major organizations in Iowa to contribute to a Teacher Education endowed scholarship*** to defray costs of the student teaching practicum in Iowa.
7. ***Develop a plan and seek funding to support ten summer interns*** at \$5000 each to be assigned to work with and be mentored by selected teachers of agriculture in Iowa. Interns will earn up to 3 Iowa State University credits of Independent Study if accepted to participate in the summer intern program.
8. ***Develop a plan to have schools apply for a summer intern for Ag Ed/FFA*** in their school. A Team-Ag Ed panel will select schools to be used as internship sites.
9. ***Develop a “long term” on-going publicity program*** to promote and advocate for having an adequate supply of future teachers of agriculture.
10. ***Develop a mentoring program*** that uses “seasoned teachers” to work with “novice teachers” in order to enhance teacher retention. Seasoned teachers will apply for and be granted a scholarship of \$500 to mentor a beginning teacher.
11. ***Encourage current agriculture teachers, FFA members, parents and guardians to collect selected data about AgEd/FFA program success*** each year. Share this report of the impact of AgEd/FFA in the local community by using a variety of social media to make the public aware of this very successful educational program.
12. ***Develop a systematic plan to seek funding from a variety of sources*** to support the recruitment of teachers of agriculture.
13. ***Produce public service radio announcements*** to be used by local radio programs in support of AgEd/FFA programs, projects and experiences.
14. ***Agricultural business and related organizations develop partnerships with Agricultural Education programs and FFA Chapters*** to promote local projects, foster development of internships and help identify future teachers of agriculture who have a passion for teaching.

# Appendix: Task Force Participants

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